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ABSTRACT

Techniques are proposed for informally assessing oral communication skills in learning disabled adolescents. A feedback sheet uses direct observation by the teacher while the self-rating scale uses an indirect form of observation by the student. Theoretical premises of the two measures are noted. The Communication Feedback Sheet is designed to assess a student's abilities in cognitive behavior modification, social perception, and pragmatics. The Creative Communication Self-Rating Scale is composed of questions to assess how creative the student is in various communication situations. Purpose, administration, interpretation, and application of each measure are described. (CL)

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Assessment of Creative Communication In Learning Disabled Adolescents

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ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE COMMUNICATION IN LEARNING DISABLED ADOLESCENTS

Introduction

The need for informal assessment procedures in determing communication skills has been cited by many authorities (Leonard, 1978; Muma, 1973). According to Taylor (1984) there is an abundance of informal assessment techniques in assessing the educational needs of students, however, in reviewing the literature in the area of communication skills, the primary informal assessment technique cited is that of analyzing communication through the use of a spontaneous language sample. While it is appropriate for a speech-language pathologist to use the spontaneous language sample, this technique is one not typically utilized by special educators for use in planning specific communication objectives for the classroom.

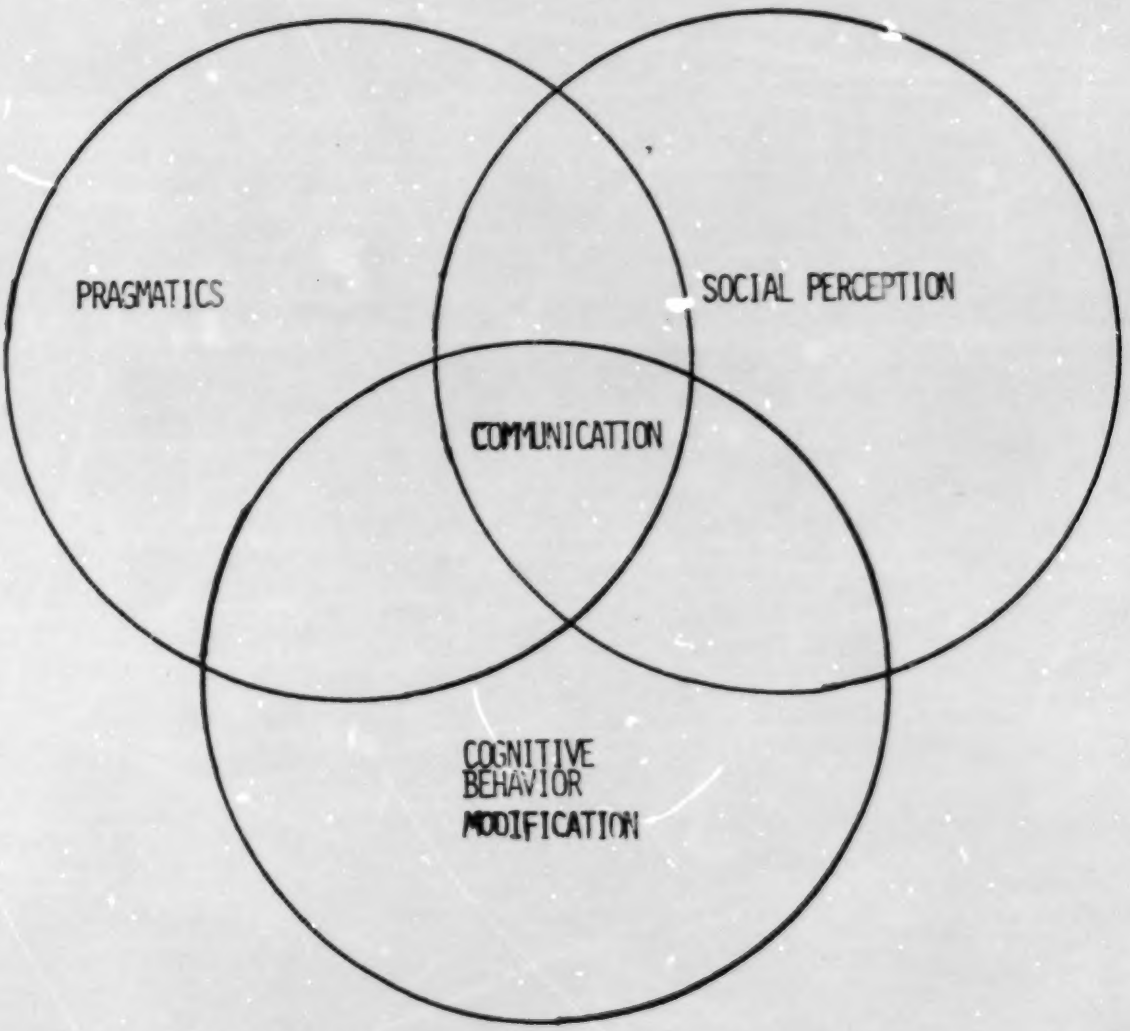
As a result of the need for assessment instruments in determining a learning disabled adolescent's oral communication skills and, according to Mercer and Mercer (1985), a need for information assessment to assist in setting instructional objectives in oral communication, this paper is being presented. Two instruments to assess the oral communication skills in the older learning disabled population will be proposed. These instruments, in the process of being developed, are the "Communication Feedback Sheet", which can be utilized by the special educator or the speech and language pathologist; and the "Creative Communication Self-rating Scale", which is utilized by the student. These instruments are designed to evaluate the use of the student's language as a creative process stemming from interaction with the environment.

The techniques proposed in this paper for informally assessing oral communication skills are viewed as unique as they offer collaboration between the teacher/therapist and the student in the assessment process. Furthermore, they are consistent with informal procedures as they determine the student's needs, they tie directly into the instructional process, and they are conducted in the natural setting of the school environment. Each instrument has the ability to reflect the perceptions of the teacher and those of the student with regard to the student's ability to utilize oral communication to manage behavior, to socialize, and to speak appropriately. It is from these perceptions that the teacher and the student can actively gain insight into the specific areas of communication needs of the learning disabled adolescent.

The "Communication Feedback Sheet" and the "Creative Communication Self-rating Scale" are designed to compliment each other as they assess the same behaviors required for specific communication situations and purposes. The Feedback Sheet utilizes a direct form of observation by the teacher, while the Self-rating Scale utilizes an indirect form of observation by the student. The observed behaviors reflect the student's ability to function as an instigator of communication, a responder to communication, and as a user of communication to facilitate appropriate behavior, within the framework of cognitive behavior modification, social perception, and pragmatics.

This paper will deal with: (1) The theoretical premise for the "Communication Feedback Sheet" and the "Creative Communication Self-rating Scale"; (2) Terminology germane to these instruments, and (3) The proposed design, administration, interpretation, and application of each assessment instrument.

MANAGEMENT OF BEHAVIOR, DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS, AND ACQUISITION OF PRAGMATICS UTILIZING A COMMUNICATION APPROACH



Presentation of the Model

The premise of this paper is that a student's ability to use effective strategies in management of behavior, social skills, and language is impeded as a result of the child's lack of understanding and use of the communication processes. The model depicts communication as the fulcrum of behavior, socialibility, and language. As a result, if the student is to advance in these three areas, behavior, socialability, and language, communication is a skill that must be taught by parents and teachers. As a skill, it should become a viable part of the instructional process. Three terms frequently seen in the current special education and language literature are cognitive behavior modification, social perception and pragmatics.

Harris (1982) defines cognitive behavior modification as the selective, purposeful combination of principles and procedures from diverse areas into training regimens or interventions, the purpose of which is to instate, modify, or extinguish cognitions, feelings, and/or behavior. According to Lerner (1981), social perception is the skill of interpreting stimuli in the social environment and appropriately relating such interpretations to the social situation. Pragmatic language, according to Lucas (1980) refers to the speaker's use of linguistic and paralinguistic skills to convey a proposition intended to alter a hearer's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. Shames and Wiig (1982), state communication refers to all of those processes by which one mind may influence another, and this includes verbal and nonverbal behavior. The purposes of communication can be those to: Get things; Get people to do what he/she wants or doesn't want to do; Give information; Get information; Describe; Solve probelms; Evaluate; Persuade; Inform; Learn; Pretend; Entertain; Express own personality; Interact socially; and Express creatively.

Communication Feedback Sheet

Purpose: The purpose of the Communication Feedback Sheet (CFS) is to assess a student's abilities in one or more of these areas: Cognitive Behavior Modification, Social Perception, and Pragmatics. In order for the older learning disabled adolescent to effectively utilize cognitive behavior modification strategies, specifically the higher levels of developing self-control, self-instruction, and self-verbalization (Meichenbaum, 1978), an adolescent must have appropriate communication strategies at his/her disposal. If the learning disabled adolescent is to interpret and relate to the social environment, the ability to correctly perceive the parameters of communication as it relates to the social situation needs to be operative. As Bryan and Bryan (1978) indicated, certain children appear to have difficulty perceiving social data, and they consequently have trouble learning how to make social judgements and learning how to adapt their behavior to the social situation. The older student needs to learn to consider the participants, the setting, the topic, and the task or objective in order to communicate effectively in a variety of situations (Lucas, 1980). Deficits in these areas become more apparent as the learning disabled student reaches adolescence and enters the transition phase between school, work, and the social environment.

Bruner (1974/1975) defined pragmatics as the "directive function of speech through which speakers affect the behavior of others in trying to carry out their intentions" (p.283). As Lucas (1980) indicates, the effectiveness of a communicator is not related to the use of extensive vocabulary, careful articulation of speech sounds, or perfect grammatical phrasing. Instead, it is based on appropriatenesss of what we say. Lucas' statement can be applied to learning disabled adolescents who must acquire pragmatic language in order to communicate appropriately in interpersonal relationships.

COMMUNICATION FEEDBACK SHEET

EVALUATION OF THE CHILD'S ABILITY TO MANAGE BEHAVIOR, USE APPROPRIATE SOCIAL SKILLS, AND USE APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

CHILD'S NAME: _____ FOR THE WEEK OF: _____

RECORDED BY: _____ PLACEMENT: _____

DATE	OBSERVED BEHAVIOR	SOCIAL SITUATION	LANGUAGE USED	SPONTANEOUS AND APPROPRIATE			SPONTANEOUS AND INAPPROPRIATE			MODEL
				B	SS	L	B	SS	L	

COMMENTS:

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS:

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Administration: The CFS is an informal, data-gathering procedure that permits direct assessment of a students performance in a variety of situations, such as the school cafeteria, in social events, in the gymnasium, as well as in the classroom. The evaluator observes the student in a variety of situations and records on the CFS: (1) Observed Behavior (what happened); (2) Social Situation (where it happened), (3) Language Used (what was said). The evaluator then checks (✓) whether the Behavior (B), the Social Situation (SS), Language (L) was either Spontaneous and Appropriate; Spontaneous and Inappropriate; or if a Model was utilized to elicit communication. A Comment Section is provided to allow the evaluator to record any other pertinent information related to the incident(s). The Suggested Intervention section can be utilized in planning the student's Individual Educational Program (IEP) or daily language lesson.

Interpretation: The inappropriate behaviors displayed by older learning disabled persons are often interpreted as behavior problems. Use of the CFS allows for additional interpretations of inappropriate activity as inappropriate social skills or inappropriate language skills as well as problems in the area of behavior. This instrument encourages the evaluator to make a finer distinction as to what is the student's actual problem. This procedure of assessment was sanctioned by Cartwright and Cartwrightin 1974 when they stated, "Observation is a process of systematically looking at and recording behavior for the purpose of making instructional decisions" (p.3). It is possible for instance to find out that certain behavior is exhibited only in certain places, at specific times, or around particular individuals. This information can be used to design the most appropriate intervention procedures.

Application: As a result of making a more refined interpretation of the student's problem, the evaluator can then design more appropriate intervention strategies specific to the area of need. Therefore, if the CFS results indicate problems in pragmatic language, appropriate remediation in this area can be implemented. If social perception problems are identified then social skill training can be initiated. If specific behaviors are apparent, then appropriate intervention strategies can be developed. If a student shows deficits in more than one area, then each should be addressed. Regardless of the single or multi-area focus, the student's progress rests on the development of communication as the pivotal point for each of these remediation processes.

Creative Communication Self-rating Scale

Purpose: Most assessment information does not allow the student to be an active participant in the evaluation process. It has been suggested by Goodman and Price (1978) that it maybe awkward for teachers to do observations at the secondary level because students may view this as an intrusion or source of embarassment. As a result they may show atypical behaviors. Therefore, as an alternative to direct observation these authors suggested private interviews for students at the secondary level. The Creative Communication Self-rating Scale (CCSS) takes into account the student's anxiety about being observed and allows them to be participants in the evaluation process.

Self-rating and/or self-reporting instruments are those where the student responds directly to the assessment items. While these instruments usually focus on measuring self-concept or personality variables, this same format has application to the communication process. CCSS can yield valuable information in little time and with minimal stress to the student.

Creative
Communication
Self-rating
Scale

Name_____ Date_____

Directions: Read each question carefully. Circle your best choice.

1. Do you tell the teacher what you don't want?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
2. Do you tell the teacher what you don't want at the right time?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
3. Do you know what you <u>do</u> want?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
4. Do you tell the teacher when you need help?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
5. Do you ask for help at the right time?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
6. Do you know what your problem is before you ask for help?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
7. Do you tell someone you like them?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
8. Do you know when to tell someone you like them?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
9. Do you know different ways to tell people you like them?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
10. Do you say hello to people?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
11. Do you say hello to your friends differently than your teacher?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
12. Do you think about how and when to greet people before you do it?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
13. Do you introduce yourself to new people?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
14. Do you talk about yourself at the right time?	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER

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15. Do you know how to tell someone they have something that belongs to you? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

16. Do you tell people how you feel? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

17. Do you know when other may not feel the same as you? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

18. Do you know how to tell people you don't like something without getting angry? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

19. Do you tell jokes? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

20. Do you think things are funny when everyone else does? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

21. Do you know when you are telling the truth or not? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

22. Do you tell people what you did over the weekend or about going somewhere? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

23. Do you tell about just those things you want to tell about, and not what others want to talk about? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

24. Do you think about what you are going to say before you say it? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

25. Do you ask questions to find out how to do your school work? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

26. Do you ask people what is wrong when they look unhappy? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

27. Do you ask yourself what you should do before you help someone? USUALLY SOMETIMES NEVER

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CCSS was designed to reflect the communicative functions identified by Halliday (1975): instrumental, regulatory, affective, conversational, personal, expressive, imaginative, informative, inquisitive. Every student needs to develop linguistic competence and every student needs to develop communicative competence. These two factors, linguistic and communicative competence, develop together. Communication can be viewed as having two components: Intrapersonal Communication, which involves thinking, feeling, self-observation, self-talk, and introspection and Interpersonal Communication, which can be described as the dynamics between individuals which affects one another. (Shames and Wiig, 1982).

The developers of the CCSS have assigned Halliday's communication functions to the various components of the model upon which the instrument is based: Cognitive Behavior Modification, Social Perception, and Pragmatics. Communication is embedded in and an integral part of all of these components. The Self-rating Scale is comprised of questions to assess how creative the student is in various communication situations. From the responses given by the student, a determination can be made with regard to the component(s) needing improvement.

Administration: Since learning disabled students may present difficulty in understanding word and sentence meaning, the same format for eliciting responses has been maintained on the rating scale. To reduce the difficulty in making decisions, response choices have been limited to three: Never, Sometimes, Usually. The CCSS consists of 27 test items, which reflect the three components: Pragmatics, Social Perception, Cognitive Behavior Modification. These can be either read by the student or by the teacher; and the student can either respond orally to the teacher or the student can circle the desired responses.

Upon completion of the CCSS, the scoring sheet is completed by the evaluator. The scoring sheet consists of: (1) the student's personal data, (2, scoring key,(3) subtest summary and (4) comment section. The response choices have been assigned numerical values of 2 points for Usually, 1 point for Sometimes, and 0 point for Never. The evaluator records the appropriate numerical value to the answers given by the student on the Subtest Summary. Each subtest, Pragmatics (P), Social Perception (SP), and Cognitive Behavior Modification (CBM) consists of 9 items. Each subtest is then totaled to obtain the Total Raw Score for each section. A Total Test Raw Score is derived from adding the 3 Subtest Total Raw Scores. Additional scoring is obtained by recording the Subtest with the Student's Highest Score and the Subtest withthe Student's Lowest Score. Other pertinent observations about the student's behavior during test administration is recorded in the Comment Section.

Interpretation: The most significant value of the CCSS is the ability to derive the students concept of him/herself as an oral communicator. It allows the student and the evaluator to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses in communicative skills of appropriate language, social language, and language to control behavior. The area with the highest raw score in Pragmatics (P), Social Perception (SP), Cognitive Behavior Modification (CBM) reflects the student's strongest area in communication. The area with the lowest raw score in Pragmatics, Social Perception, Cognitive Behavior Modification reflects the student's weakest area in communication.

Application: In consultation, the student and the teacher will review the Subtest Summary. CCSS can be used independently to identify needed areas of intervention as perceived by the student or used in conjunction with the CFS results for comparative purposes. Common areas of agreement

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION SELF-RATING SCALE

NAME_____

SCHOOL_____ GRADE_____

EXAMINER_____

DATE OF ADMINISTRATION_____
Year Month Day

BIRTHDATE _____
Year Month Day

CHRONOLOGICAL AGE _____
Year Month Day

SCORING KEY: Usually = 2 points
Sometimes = 1 point
Never = 0 points

SUBTEST SUMMARY

Pragmatic Subtest	Social Perception Subtest	Cognitive Behavior Subtest
Question #1_____	Question #2_____	Question #3_____
#4_____	#5_____	#6_____
#7_____	#8_____	#9_____
#10_____	#11_____	#12_____
#13_____	#14_____	#15_____
#16_____	#17_____	#18_____
#19_____	#20_____	#21_____
#22_____	#23_____	#24_____
#25_____	#26_____	#27_____
Total Raw Score _____	Total Raw Score _____	Total Raw Score_____

TOTAL TEST RAW SCORE_____

AREA WITH HIGHEST RAW SCORE P SP CBM

AREA WITH LOWEST RAW SCORE P SP CBM
(circle one)

COMMENTS_____

_____

Developed By: Betty Schultze & Rebecca Flaton, April 1985, St.Louis,Mo.

between teacher and student perceptions would tend to verify the student's communicative strengths and weaknesses. CCSS results can then be utilized by teacher and student in a cooperative effort to design classroom activities to strengthen and remediate the designated communication problem. The student is then an active participant in setting his/her own program goals.

Summary

The two instruments presented in this paper, "Communication Feedback Sheet" and the "Creative Communication Self-rating Scale" are proposed assessment tools which reflect a perceived need to assist the learning disabled adolescent in identifying oral communication needs. By carefully analyzing oral communication in this population, both teacher and student may then begin to see the student's problem as deficits in communication rather than deficits in behavior. As these instruments are refined and field tested more validity can be given to this premise.